

# SOCRATES

## Some Prolegomena...

### The paradigmatic philosopher

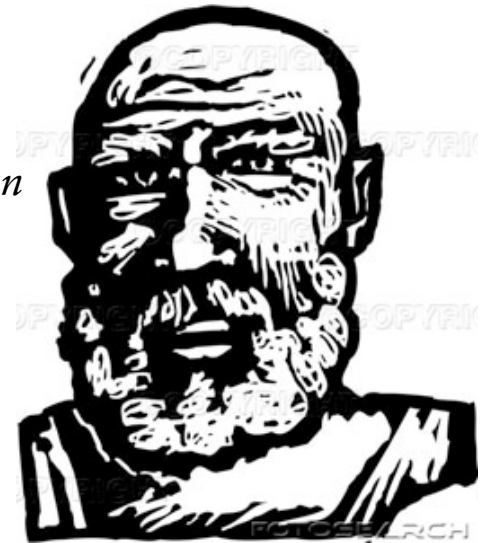
- » The 'exemplar of the self-examined life', 'consummate intellectual moralist', 'skillful cross-examiner' and 'paragon of rationality' — *professing to believe only those things and perform only those actions that he can provide a rational justification for.*

### The 'strangeness' of Socrates

- » Ugly (big-eyed, snub-nosed, fat-lipped), unkempt (long-haired, barefooted, usually unwashed, pajama wearing), heavy drinking, swagger walking, etc
- » Unconventional (embraced poverty, avoided political activity, was a feminist, was not the typical Greek lover, often visited by a *daimonion*)

### The 'Socratic problem'

- » Since Socrates wrote nothing and all of our information regarding his life and philosophical views comes to us by way of an often conflicting corpus of second-hand testimony, how do we know which portrayal of Socrates is the *real* one?

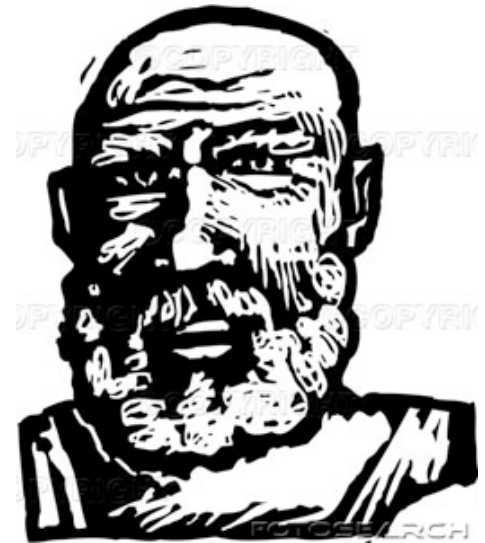


# SOCRATES

## Some Prolegomena...

### The *Platonic* Socrates versus *Historical* Socrates?

- » *The Unitarian View* - there is a single philosophy to be found in all of Plato's works (of any period-if such periods can even be identified reliably). There is no reason, according to the Unitarian scholar, ever to talk about a non-Platonic "Socratic philosophy".
- » *The Literary Atomist View* - each dialogue ought to be seen as a complete literary whole, whose proper interpretation must be achieved without reference to any of Plato's other works. As such, there is no reason to make any distinction between "Socratic philosophy" and "Platonic philosophy." All philosophy to be found in the works of Plato should be attributed only to Plato.
- » *The Developmentalist View* - the differences between the early and later dialogues represent developments in Plato's own philosophical and literary career. Some *Developmentalists* identify the earlier positions or works as "Socratic" and the later ones as "Platonic," but may be agnostic about the relationship of the "Socratic" views and works to the actual historical Socrates.

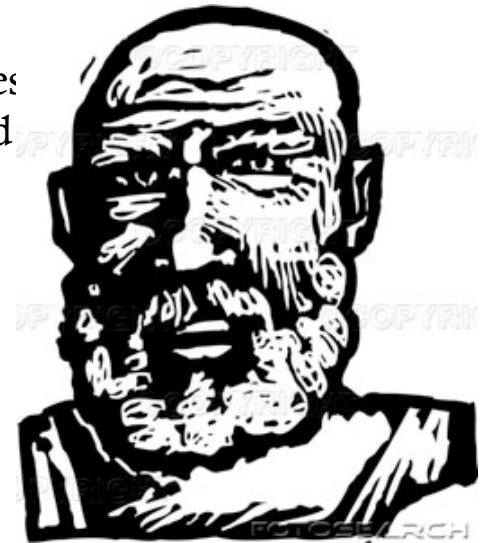


# SOCRATES

## Some Prolegomena...

### A conservative *Developmentalist* grouping of the dialogues

- » *The Early ('Socratic') Dialogues* – Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Alcibiades, Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthydemus, Hippias Major and Minor and most likely the Protagoras, Gorgias and Republic I
- » *The Middle Dialogues* – Meno, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic II-X, Phaedrus, Cratylus and Parmenides
- » *The Late Dialogues* – Theaetetus, Timaeus, Philebus, Critias, Sophist, Statesman and the Laws



### Some basic, plausible differences

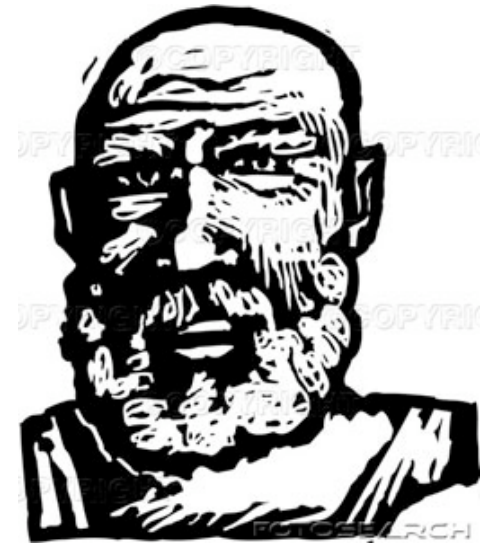
- » Generally speaking, the early dialogues have as their principal aim the characterization of the 'historical' Socrates—his mission, method and general intellectual demeanor—rather than the promulgation of positive ('Platonic') philosophical theses. According to Aristotle, the early dialogues limit themselves (almost) exclusively to questions of ethics and the conduct of life, whereas the middle and late dialogues range widely into all areas of metaphysics and epistemology as well.

# THE *APOLOGY*

## Some Prolegomena...

### Background and context of the dialogue

- » Social and political instability in Athens
- » Socrates' and his 'bad reputation' – the 'old, slanderous charges'
- » The trial and 'defense' (*apologia*) of Socrates – in 399 Socrates is brought to trial on charges of 'impiety'. More specifically, he is formally charged with (1) *not* recognizing the gods of the state, (2) introducing *new* divinities and (3) corrupting the youth of Athens (by teaching these things to his 'followers' or 'pupils')



### The Oracle's 'puzzling' pronouncement

- » "there is no one wiser than Socrates..." (21a)

### Making sense of the pronouncement

- » "What can the god be saying? What does his mean? For I am only too aware that *I've no claim to being wise in anything either great or small*. What can he mean, then, by saying that I'm wisest? Surely he can't be lying... [for] that isn't lawful for him to do" (21b)

# THE *APOLOGY*

## Socrates' Mission and Method...

### Making sense of the pronouncement (continued)...

- » “For a long time, I was perplexed about what he meant... [so] I proceeded to examine it in the following way. I approached one of the people *thought to be wise*, assuming that in his company, if anywhere, I could refute the pronouncement and say to the oracle, ‘Here is someone wiser than I...’ (21b-c)
- » “But when *I examined him and talked with him*... my experience was something like this: [although] this man seemed wise to many people, and especially to himself, [he really] wasn’t... [and so] I tried to show him that [although] he thought himself wise, [he really] wasn’t. But, as a result, he came to dislike me and so did many of the people present... After that... I kept approaching one person after another... and it seemed to me that the same thing occurred...” (21c-d)
- » “[In the end], I thought to myself... [perhaps the Oracle is correct, and] ‘I am wiser than these people. For it is likely that *none of us knows anything fine and good*, but they think they know something they don’t, whereas I, since I don’t in fact know, don’t think that I do either. *So at any rate, it seems that I am wiser... in just this one small way: that what I don’t know, I don’t think I know*’ (21d-e)



# THE *APOLOGY*

## Socrates' Mission and Method...

### Responding to the oracle's pronouncement...

- » While investigating the meaning of the oracle's pronouncement by questioning those he thought were wise, Socrates discovered that they were in fact ignorant (of what they professed to know) – and worse, ignorant even of their own ignorance
- » All but Socrates supposed that these 'wise' individuals had wisdom of the most important things—*how to live well, be virtuous, and be happy*—yet, all were ignorant
- » Worse, because they (falsely) supposed they were wise, they did not examine their lives as they should, smugly supposing that their way of living was the 'best' (most important) way to live
- » Socrates believed that the oracle was giving him a *moral-mission*: He must *examine people* relentlessly, *demonstrating their ignorance* to them and *encouraging them to care more for virtue* than for the reputation and wealth they so prized (29d-e), and exhort them to always *open their lives up to examination* – for “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being” (38a)

*divine 'gadfly'*



*divine 'midwife'*

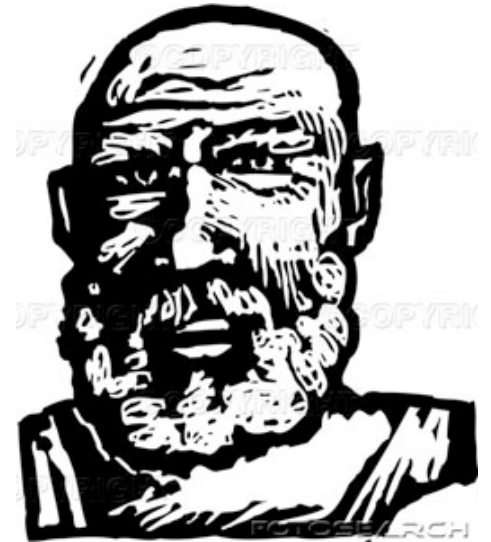


# THE *APOLOGY*

## Socrates' Mission and Method...

Three important Socratic concepts...

1. *Expert-knowledge (techné)*
2. *The 'Socratic method' (elenchus)*
3. *Socratic definitions and the 'what is it?' question*



# THE *APOLOGY*

## The Charges, Defense and Verdict...

### Guilty of *corrupting the youth*?

- » Who is (typically) able to 'corrupt' and/or 'improve' the young... the few or the many?
- » It seems unlikely that Socrates is the only one responsible for corrupting the youth of Athens... moreover, why would he?

### Guilty of *impiety*?

- » What's the charge exactly?
- » Can a person believe in things like 'horse activities' and yet not in the existence of horses? So too with divine things: Since Socrates believes in a *diamonion* (a divine thing), it follows that he believes in divinities.

### What has Socrates shown?

- » Are Socrates' counter-arguments *good arguments*?
- » If so, perhaps Meletus is the *real* guilty party... not Socrates





# SOCRATES

## Charges, Defense and Verdict (Apology II)

### Why *neither* the verdict *nor* the penalty are bad (for Socrates)

- » “You are wrong, sir, if you think that a man who is any good at all should take into account the risk of life or death; he should look to this only in his actions, whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is acting like a good or a bad man...”
- » “To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know...”
- » “Let us reflect in this way, too, that there is good hope that death is a blessing, for it is one of two things: either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocation for the soul from here to another place...”



### Some (famous) final words...

- » “The hour of departure has arrived and we go our ways; I to die, and you to live. Which is better? Only god knows...”